

Crucial 90 Days Ahead in Battle With Reds

Viet War Desperate: McNamara Sees Chiefs

From Cable Dispatches

SAIGON.

U. S. Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara landed in Saigon yesterday and promptly plunged into a series of briefings by top-American military advisers on South Viet Nam's desperate struggle against Communist-led Viet Cong guerrillas.

The reports he got were hardly encouraging. The military junta that seized control of the government on Nov. 1 spends too much time politicking and not enough fighting the war, in the American view.

A step-up in the number of guerrilla raids and ambushes has taken a heavy toll since the overthrow of President Ngo Dinh Diem. Yesterday a U. S. spokesman reported 11 government troops killed in clashes with the Viet Cong and claimed 12 guerrilla deaths.

"If things don't get moving within 90 days, we are lost," said one American official.

Mr. McNamara, accompanied by two Assistant Secretaries of State, was met at the airport by U. S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Gen. Paul D. Harkins, the chief American military adviser in the country, and Maj. Gen. Tran Van Don, South Viet Nam's Defense Minister.

U. S. Central Intelligence Agency director John A. McCone slipped into Saigon unannounced on Wednesday night to sit in on the talks, and there were reports that the CIA chief in Laos had flown in from

Vientiane along with U. S. Ambassador Leonard Unger.

Before climbing into a limousine with Ambassador Lodge at the airport, Mr. McNamara said noncommittally, "I am here to determine the progress of our program, discuss its problems and find solutions."

After his last visit to Viet Nam, in September, Secretary McNamara reported to the late President Kennedy that virtually all the 17,000 Americans there could probably be withdrawn by the end of 1965 if the anti-Communist war could go well. About 1,000 pulled out last month.



Herald Tribune—UPI radiotelephoto

MISSION TO SAIGON—Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, left, arrives at Saigon airport and is greeted by Ambassador to South Viet Nam Henry Cabot Lodge (center) and Vietnamese Defense Minister Maj. Gen. Tran Van Don. Mr. McNamara flew there for high-level talks on war against Communist Viet Cong guerrilla forces.

In recent weeks the Viet Cong has tightened its stranglehold on the rice-bowl Mekong Delta region and a government counter-offensive in the hard-pressed area just south of the capital has not yet materialized.

An American spokesman also admitted yesterday that the country's main north-south rail line was blown up yesterday for the second time in a week, only 30 miles from Saigon. Troops were rushed to the area to keep the guerrillas from looting the wrecked train.

Mr. McNamara was to meet today—after his thorough briefing—with Maj. Gen. Duong Van Minh, head of the ruling junta, and then with Premier Nguyen Ngoc Tho. The Defense Secretary is scheduled to fly back to Washington tonight.